

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR LISTENING: A THEORETICAL ASSUMPTION

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Abstract: Of the four language skills, listening is often considered to be the most crucial for the language learner since listening is a highly interactive skill and many SLA researchers have demonstrated its significant role in language acquisition (Vandergrift 1996). The appropriateness and effective usage of listening strategies can help learners to facilitate the language process. Oxford (1989) states that there is a relationship between learner's variables and the choice of language learning strategies (LLSs). Therefore, the use of appropriate LLSs, especially metacognitive strategies are significant to improve and advance learners' listening proficiency because their language level will rise.

Key words: listening strategies, language learning strategies (LLSs), metacognitive strategies, teacher education

INTRODUCTION

Krashen (1982) asserts that comprehensible input is a necessary and indispensable condition for language learning when considering the relationship between input and adjustments and message comprehension. In his input hypothesis, Krashen (1985) states that if the learner can comprehend the language that contains linguistic items (lexis, syntax, morphology) at a slightly above the learners current level ($i + 1$), then, s/he can achieve the further development in learning, especially in listening and

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reading ability (Rost 2001). Although Krashen does not refer to strategic adjustments, which learners makes in understanding the new information, I believe his assertion — in spite of the endless controversy for the reliability and validity, which implies the notion of $i+1$ is vague and inaccurate – has an implication that many Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers go into learning strategies researchers, at least to some extent.

This article investigates the effects of the language learning strategies, especially listening strategies. I hypothesize 1) the implementation of teaching learning strategies as effective for learners to improve their listening proficiency, and 2) students can use more metacognitive strategies than cognitive and socio-affective strategies as their levels of comprehension increase. In brief, this article argues that fostering the acquisition of the appropriate listening strategies, particularly metacognitive strategies is significant to enhance success in listening comprehension (O'Malley and Chamot 1990, Vandergrift 1996, Rost 2001).

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY OF LISTENING STRATEGIES

As for the definition of the listening strategies, Rost (2001) notes that there are conscious plans to deal with incoming speech, especially when the listener tries to compensate for the incomplete input or partial understanding. As for the representative researchers in this area, the following three are picked up: 1) Rost and Ross (1991), 2) Kasper (1984) and 3) Vandergrift (1996).

Firstly, Rost and Ross (1991) discuss that more proficient listeners tend to use more hypothesis testing (asking about information about the story), rather than lexical push down (asking about the word meanings) and global reprises (asking for repetition). They also report that if listeners follow the training sessions, they could ask more hypothesis questions.

Secondly, Kasper's (1984) study using think aloud protocols found that L2 listeners tend to form an initial interpretation of a topic (a frame) and then stick to it, trying to fit incoming words and propositions into that frame.

Thirdly, Vandergrift's (1990) strategy classification consists of metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies. He found that the

higher the learners' levels are, the more they use the metacognitive strategies. Then, based on the findings, Vandergrift proposes a pedagogic plan for encouraging the use of metacognitive strategies at all proficiency levels in order to increase the learners' comprehension in listening.

Of the four language skills, listening is often considered to be the most crucial for the language learning since listening is a highly interactive skill and many SLA researchers have demonstrated its significant role in language acquisition (Vandergrift 1996). Furthermore, Rost (2001) notes that listening involves both bottom-up processing and top-down processing, which takes places at various level of cognitive organization: phonological, grammatical, lexical and propositional. Listening strategies, therefore, are the most beneficial for teachers to nurture (Vandergrift 1996). I think the appropriate and effective use of the listening strategies can help learners to facilitate the language process. Because of this, as the listening strategies are amongst the many other language learning strategies (LLSs), in this article, I expand the area of the literature review to the LLSs so that I could gain further consideration on listening strategies themselves.

A HISTORY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES RESEARCH

Ellis (1994) explains that the research of language learning strategies (LLSs) has a rather short history of 20 years. Therefore, it is probably true to say that it is still in its infancy: earlier studies are just listed techniques and devices of the general learners and later studies. On the other hand, in which many aspects have been progressed, adopting cognitive psychology began to systematically classify them into taxonomy of LLS, where learners' characteristics or variables are no longer emphasized. For the reason of its short history, perhaps, when considering the definition of LLSs, there is no widely accepted theoretical basis or notion, although of course I think O'Malley and Chamot has successfully produced an influential classified table which consists of metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies. For instance, several definitions are to be picked up as below:

- 1) Stern (1983): Strategies is best reserved for general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach

employed by the language learner, learning techniques as the term to refer to particular forms of observable learning behavior.

- 2) Weinstein and Mayer (1986): Learning strategies are the behaviors and thoughts that a learners engages in during learning that are intended to influence the learner's encoding process.
- 3) Chamot (1987): Learning strategies are techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students takes in order to facilitate the learning call of both linguistic content area information.
- 4) Rubin (1987): Learning strategies are strategies, which contributes the development of the language systems which the learner constructs and affect learning directly.
- 5) Oxford (1989): Language learning strategies are behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable.
- 6) Ellis (1994): Strategies are consisted of mental and behavioral activity related some specific stage in the overall process of language acquisition and language use.

As the six examples clearly show, the definitions of LLSs differ from each other, some of which are described as a behavioral and others are described as mental and behavioral ones. Regardless of its definitional problems, here I would like to adapt from Righney (1978) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990): LLSs are deliberate, cognitive steps used by learners to enhance comprehension, learning and retention of the target language; they can be accepted for conscious verbal report. Again, LLSs are different from communication strategies and production strategies. I am referring to Ellis (1994) who states communication strategies (CS) are the attempt to deal with problems of communication that have arisen in interaction. For instance, Tarone (1977) describes that CS are how to compensate communication in trouble, saying "Could you repeat again?" "I did not understand what you said, so please speak more slowly", and categorized CS into the following five items: 1) avoidance, 2) paraphrase, 3) conscious transfer, 4) appeal for assistance, and 5) mime.

Production strategies (PS) on the other hand, are the attempt to use one's linguistic systems efficiently and clearly within a minimum effort, for example, using formulaic expressions or phrase books. In the process of categorizing them, I think CS and PS are considered to be sort of language use, and motivated by a desire to communicate from the cognitivist's point of view. However, LLSs are motivated by a desire to learn though it is difficult to determine. Furthermore, on the other hand, CS and LLSs are distinguished from PS in that the formers are a problem orientation and use consciousness, while the latter is not problematic, rather, quite straightforward. The ways of categorizing them are based on the language learning theory through communication. Ellis (1994) also states the ambiguity of the theoretical definitional issues in LLSs. The study of the LLSs has its roots in good language learners' study (Rubin 1975, Stern 1975, Naiman et al. 1978), in which it was identified that successful learners were interviewed and asked to complete a questionnaire. Then, researchers observed and identified the overall behavioral patterns among them.

As the main characteristics of good language learners, the following five points are picked up (Ellis 1994): 1) a concern for language form, 2) a concern for communication (functional practice), 3) an active task approach, 4) an awareness of the learning process, 5) a capacity to use strategies flexibly in accordance with task requirements. However, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) note and citing Rubin's (1975) work, that the employment of these strategies depends upon the level of 1) target language proficiency, 2) the learner's age, 3) the task, 4) individual style, 5) context and possible cultural differences.

Subsequently, as the first step, Rubin (1981), refined her earlier work, conducting experiments to identify the cognitive process of the successful language learners, and categorized the strategies into two groups: 1) process that contribute directly to learning (clarification / verification, monitoring, memorization, guessing, inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning, practice) 2) process that contribute indirectly to learning (creating opportunity for practice, production tricks). Then, Rubin (1981) distinguishes between macro-tactics and micro-tactics. Next, Oxford (1990) produces the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which is a classification tool which has more than 60 LLSs. This SILL

reflects Rubin's distinction by posing two categories of strategies: a) Direct strategies — memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, b) Indirect strategies — metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, social strategies. The SILL is considered to be a useful and better tool to systematically classify many LLSs, though the way of research is deductive or kept within a “research-then theory” perspective.

As the second step, during this period, many SLA researchers have realized the effects of many variables in choosing strategies, like methods of teaching, cultural and educational backgrounds, gender, and proficiency, etc. (Ellis 1994). For instance, Politzer and McGroarty (1985) compared ESL students responses on a self-report survey of LLSs to test survey of LLSs to test scores for aural comprehension, grammar, and communicative competence. The result indicates that many different variables can affect strategy choice like achievement, level of language learning, goal of language study, method of teaching, cultural background of the learner, and gender. Likewise, Oxford (1989), using SILL examines the relationship between LLSs and learners variables, concluded that factors as motivation, gender, and years of language study had the greatest effect on strategy use. Therefore, these kinds of researches revealed that there is the interaction between learner's variables and the choice of LLSs. However, as Vandergrift (1996) points out, while Oxford's SILL has been an important tool to investigate how to systematically classify the strategies, it is not ground in theory as I have previously discussed. In order to present a theoretical framework, I will pick up the distinguished work in this field by O'Malley and Chamot.

As the third step, adopting cognitive science as theoretical base of LLSs, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) categories LLSs into three aspects: 1) metacognitive strategies — planning, monitoring, evaluating, 2) cognitive strategies — inferencing, elaboration, 3) socio-affective strategies — questioning for clarification, cooperation, lowering anxiety, self-encouragement, taking emotional temperature. They identify 26 cognitive strategies in total. In addition, mainly, they found the following things 1) learners at intermediate level use more metacognitive strategies than lower levels, 2) in pronunciation and vocabulary learning, LLSs are more used than in cognitive developing tasks as listening and speaking, 3) students

might benefit most from strategy instruction in these skills, 4) the use of metacognitive strategies is effective since they set the direction by overseeing, regulating, or self-directing language learning (Ellis 1994).

The works of O'Malley and Chamot, using cognitive theory as a basis, provide a great structural base and a strong theoretical base to the area of LLSs researches, therefore, this tripartite classification scheme can be used as the significant framework for the future research efforts in this LLSs field (Vandergrift 1996, Ellis 1994, Larsen and Freeman, 1991).

TRAINING OF LEARNERS IN USING LLSs.

As far as I have discussed, the use of appropriate LLSs, especially metacognitive strategies are significant to improve and advance learner's listening proficiency as their language levels rise. (O'Malley and Chomot 1990, Ellis 1994, Vandergrift 1996), because I think with this effective use of the skills and strategies, learners could have more comprehensible input for SLA (Krashen 1985), learners could lessen their anxiety in listening (Duley, Burt and Krashen 1982) and could even increase their motivation by having stronger confidence (Anderson and Lynch 1988).

Therefore, here I will consider how teachers could teach those kinds of strategies effectively to learners by reviewing related articles. Firstly, Rubin (1994) and many other researchers (Mendelson 1998) assert the importance of listening strategies training in the classroom teaching. Furthermore, Mendelson (1998) notes that the materials have increasingly come to include the strategy training, particularly the significance of the schemata, prior to listening, which leads pre-, while, and post-listening phases (Underwood 1989). Then, Rost (1994) presents a framework for incorporating 5 types of listening strategies into classroom instruction, which consists of 1) predicting, 2) monitoring, 3) inferencing, 4) clarifying, and 5) responding. As for the way of the strategy training itself, perhaps, we can pick up three ways: 1) explicit training, direct training, 2) embedded strategy training, and 3) combined strategy training.

Please note, although Bialystock (1985) expresses his doubt, by restricting their effects, that LLSs training is effective only under specific condition and teachers should employ teaching strategies that are

incongruous with useful experience; I understand that it does not mean he completely rejects the effects of teaching LLSs. Training is effective only under specific condition and teachers should employ teaching strategies that are incongruous with useful experience. However, it is somewhat surprising, that there have been few empirical quantitative studies that have attempted to evaluate the success of the strategies training, as Ellis (1994) and Larsen and Freeman (1991) have argued.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

As far as I have discussed and after reviewing LLSs related articles, I conclude with my agreement with Ellis (1994) who regards it is clear that the teaching of learning strategies will receive an increasing attention in teacher education, since the SLA researcher have not yet developed this academic field. Empowering learners by having them develop LLSs might help them to not only cope with classroom tasks, but also continue to learn, which is to promote self-autonomous learning. Moreover, learners' variables, such as age, gender, proficiency, cultural and educational background, etc. and situational factors such as task difficulty, informal and formal setting, and goals, etc. will inevitably influence and interact with the choice of LLSs. Lastly, I also agree that the right and appropriate choice of LLSs may determine the rate and level of the achievement as well which is considered to be significant for both teachers and learners. It is for these reasons, that I suggest research to be done to prove the rise of learners' listening strategies as a point to improve the overall skills of the English language.

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